

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A method for facilitating transactions in a wide area network, comprising:  
providing information relating to a transaction between a first party and a second  
5 party to a third party via the wide area network; and  
enabling the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction between the first  
and second parties via the wide area network.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes a bid price associated  
10 with the first party and an ask price associated with the second party, and wherein enabling  
the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises enabling the third  
party to cover at least part of a difference between the bid and ask prices via the wide area  
network.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes a bid price associated  
15 with the first party and an ask price associated with the second party, and wherein enabling  
the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises transmitting a  
counteroffer to the first party via the wide area network, the counteroffer covering a portion  
of a difference between the bid and ask prices.

4. The method of claim 3 further comprising notifying the second party of the  
counteroffer via the wide area network.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes a bid price associated  
25 with the first party and an ask price associated with the second party, and wherein enabling

the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises transmitting an acceptance to the first party via the wide area network, the acceptance covering the difference between the bid and ask prices.

5           6.       The method of claim 5 further comprising notifying the second party of the acceptance via the wide area network.

10           7.       The method of claim 1 wherein providing the information comprises transmitting a web page to the third party via the wide area network, an entry in the web page corresponding to the transaction between the first and second parties.

15           8.       The method of claim 7 wherein enabling the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises providing at least one active object in the web page associated with the entry.

          9.       The method of claim 8 wherein the at least one active object comprises an acceptance button, activation of the acceptance button resulting in transmission of an acceptance to the first party via the wide area network.

20           10.      The method of claim 8 wherein the at least one active object comprises counteroffer button, activation of the counteroffer button resulting in transmission of a counteroffer to the first party via the wide area network.

25           11.      The method of claim 1 wherein providing the information comprises filtering current system bids according to at least one criterion specified by the third party.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the current system bids each have a bid price and an ask price associated therewith, the at least one criterion including at least one of a product category, a product seller, and a spread which is compared with a difference between the bid and ask prices for each current system bid.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein enabling the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises enabling the third party to specify at least one business rule for automatically responding to system bids via the wide area network.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein enabling the third party to specify the at least one business rule comprises providing a plurality of criteria to the third party via the wide area network, the at least one business rule corresponding to a subset of the criteria specified by the third party.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the plurality of criteria includes at least one of a product identifier, a merchant identifier, a number of units being bid, a buyer reputation indicator, and whether an identified merchant has an identified product in stock.

16. The method of claim 13 wherein enabling the third party to specify the at least one business rule comprises providing a plurality of response options to the third party via the wide area network, the at least one business rule corresponding to a subset of the response options specified by the third party.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the plurality of response options includes at least one of communicate an acceptance and communicate a counteroffer.

18. The method of claim 13 further comprising controlling implementation of the  
5 at least one business rule with reference to at least one other business rule associated with the second party.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein controlling implementation of the at least  
one business rule comprises implementing the at least one other business rule before  
10 implementing the at least one business rule.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein controlling implementation of the at least  
one business rule comprises waiting a predetermined time period before implementing the at  
least one business rule.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising enabling a fourth party to facilitate  
consummation of the transaction between the first and second parties in conjunction with the  
third party via the wide area network.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the information includes a bid price  
20 associated with the first party and an ask price associated with the second party, wherein  
enabling the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises enabling the  
third party to cover a first portion of a difference between the bid and ask prices, and wherein  
enabling the fourth party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises enabling the  
25 fourth party to cover a remainder portion of the difference.

23. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes an identifier identifying the transaction as relating to a product which is part of a mutually exclusive bid group defined by one of the first and second parties.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein enabling the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction comprises enabling the third party to specify at least one business rule for automatically responding to system bids via the wide area network, the at least one business rule relating to the identifier.

25. A computer program product for facilitating transactions in a wide area network, comprising:

at least one computer readable medium; and

computer program instructions stored in the at least one computer readable medium

for causing at least one computer to:

provide information relating to a transaction between a first party and a second party to a third party via the wide area network; and

enable the third party to facilitate consummation of the transaction between the first and second parties via the wide area network.

26. A method for facilitating transactions in a wide area network, comprising:  
selectively providing information relating to a plurality of bids on a transaction site to a third party via the wide area network, a first one of the bids involving a first party and a second party, the first bid including a bid price associated with the first party and an ask price associated with the second party;

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